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SUBJECT: PERU AND AVIAN FLU -- OPPORTUNITY TO COLLABORATE

REF: A) Lima 3924 (B) State 164134 (C) State 153802

1. Summary: The GOP is slowly progressing on its action plan to combat the Avian Flu threat, but the Health and Agriculture Ministries have insufficient resources to implement it. Public health capacity is already stretched thinly across a wide range of needs. Peru is at risk due to expanding commerce with Asia, an extensive poultry industry and its key position as a stopping point for north/south and east/west avian migration. The U.S. Naval Medical Institute's presence in Peru can support aspects of planning for and responding to any epidemic in South America. End Summary.

#### PERU'S ACTION PLAN IN PROGRESS

2. Peru has a small head start on handling the predicted high lethality Avian Flu epidemic. No cases of Avian Flu have been reported in Peru, according to Vice Minister of Health, Jose Carlos del Carmen, in a September 9 meeting with ESTH officer that included the Ministry's entire Avian Flu team. The Ministry of Health has recognized the threat for several years, del Carmen said, and began developing an action plan in 2003, accelerated after Ministry officials learned of several cases in Chile. In 2004 the Health Ministry began a series of workshops targeted to various sectors of the economy -- the poultry industry, scientific researchers and the health care field.

3. After circulating Ref B invitation to join a U.S.-initiated Avian Flu partnership among the Health, Foreign and Agriculture ministries, Vice Minister del Carmen and Foreign Ministry Director for Social Issues, Maria Eugenia Echevarria, reported to ESTH office the GOP's enthusiasm for working with the U.S. on this issue (Ref A). NMRC director noted that the Health Minister has had a strong interest in cooperating with the U.S. on Avian Flu research and prevention since she assumed her position, an interest shared by her predecessor. Echevarria said on September 9 that President Toledo's staff is planning to brief Toledo extensively to prepare him for participating on this issue at UNGA.

4. The Health Ministry is almost finished with its master action plan to combat the Avian Flu threat. The Ministry plans a final multi-sectoral workshop that would bring together University researchers, the poultry industry and clinical health care workers, but it lacks the resources to conduct the workshop. An interagency action plan will then be based on the workshop results. Dr. Raul Zegara, Director of Avian Flu and Newcastle's Disease programs at the Ministry of Agriculture's inspection service, SENASA, told ESTHoff that lessons learned from Peru's participation in the recent multi-nation Avian Flu outbreak simulation exercise in Argentina would be used to finalize the master action plan.

#### CURRENT INSPECTIONS AND NEXT STEPS

5. The Health Ministry's focus so far has been on laboratory investigation of Avian Flu. Dr. Luis Suarez Ognio, the Health Ministry's director for Avian Flu issues, said that the next step in the Ministry's action plan involves linking clinical practice to existing research, as well as conducting an information campaign for the general public on signs of avian flu and how to prevent transmission. Funds are lacking for both of these steps, Dr. Suarez said.

6. SENASA currently inspects poultry for signs of Avian Flu. Dr. Zegara told ESTHoff on September 12 that since November of 2004 his agency has performed over 11,000 tests for Avian Flu, which SENASA has incorporated into its program for Newcastle's Disease testing. In the next few days Zegara said he would orchestrate an official message to the OAS that Peru was free of Avian Flu. SENASA existing inspections cover large poultry operations, small-scale poultry raising and house pets. In November, in cooperation with GOP environmental agency INRENA, SENASA will begin inspecting migratory wild bird populations.

#### PERU HIGH RISK FOR SPREAD OF AVIAN FLU

17. The U.S. Naval Medical Research Center Detachment (NMRCDC) has an extensive research program in Peru. NMRCDC Director confirmed Health Ministry officials' description of Peru as a prime risk for an Avian Flu outbreak. Peru's coast is an important stop for migratory birds journeying between North and South America; there is also a significant migration pattern for birds between the coast and lowland jungle extending into Brazil and Bolivia.

18. The extensive poultry industry is another risk factor for Peru, coupled with the prevalence throughout the country of local markets that mix chicken, duck and other avian species. Peru's chicken and duck industries are concentrated along its coast, near zones of North/South wild bird migrations.

#### NMRCDC AND USAID EFFORTS

19. Peru is an ideal location for Avian Flu research and programs due to its risk factors and the existing presence of the NMRCDC, with physicians and researchers in Lima's port of Callao and in the largest jungle metropolis, Iquitos. NMRCDC staff participated in the GOP's first Avian Flu workshop in 2004. NMRCDC priorities have been Malaria, Dengue Fever and diarrheal diseases; NMRCDC staff have a strong interest in Avian Flu programs but lack the resources to conduct Avian Flu research. Agricultural Attache has an extensive network of contacts and cooperation in the poultry industry that could be enlisted to support a research effort.

110. USAID/Washington's coordination of worldwide preparation for an epidemic has so far prioritized its Asian missions. USAID/Peru has limited resources to support public health planning and interventions related to an Avian Flu epidemic; efforts will focus on building capacity among health care providers, managers, and health communications specialists.

111. Points of Contact for followup at Embassy are ESTH Officer Hal Howard, (51-1) 618-2414, howardhh@state.gov and NMRCDC Director for Infections Diseases CDR David Blazes, MD, (51-1) 618-2922, blazes@nmrcd.med.navy.mil. POC for the GOP is Dr. Luis Suarez Ognio, Director General of Epidemiology, Ministry of Health, (51-1) 433-0081, lsuarez@oge.sld.pe; Dr. Suarez speaks English well.

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